

MAINE PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT NETWORK SYSTEM



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****ADVISORY – Important Information****

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TO: All HAN Recipients

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SUBJECT: **If the Power Goes Out, Generators Go Outside**

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If the Power Goes Out, Generators Go Outside

Remember Carbon Monoxide Can Kill

With high winds and heavy rains expected for Maine from Hurricane Sandy, the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (MeCDC) is advising people to plan ahead to stay safe and healthy during and after the storm. “One of the things we worry about most during and after a big storm is people using gas-powered generators improperly when the power goes out,” said MeCDC Director, Dr. Sheila Pinette.

After Tropical Storm Irene hit Maine and New England in August 2011, carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning was the cause of two deaths and four non-fatal poisonings in Maine. In each case, the carbon monoxide came from improper operation of generators during the power outages that followed the storm.

“People may be tempted to run gas-powered generators in the basement or garage but this is extremely dangerous,” said Dr. Pinette. Always use generators outside and make sure your generator is at least 15 feet from windows or doors. Pinette urged Mainers to check where they would place their generator and to be sure that they have an extension cord that will allow the generator to be placed appropriately. Pinette said that those who operate generators should think ahead about a safe way to protect the generator from water in order to avoid electrical hazards.

Every home should also have a carbon monoxide detector that can run on batteries. “Now is also the time to check the batteries in your carbon monoxide detector, or get a detector if you don’t have one” she said.

CO is a colorless, odorless gas formed when burning most types of fuels. Using gas-powered generators, charcoal grills, and gas grills can cause poisoning if CO gas builds-up in enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces, even if windows and doors are left open. Warning signs of CO poisoning are flu symptoms like headache, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, drowsiness, and confusion, but no fever. Carbon monoxide poisoning can cause coma and death.

How to Prevent CO Poisoning During Power Outages

- **Place generator outdoors** in the fresh air. Keep it at least 15 feet from windows or doors. Do not put a generator in a closed or partly closed space, like a basement, cellar bulkhead, or attached garage. Carbon monoxide can build up to dangerous levels in these spaces.
- **Make a plan for how to keep your generator dry** and protected from rain so you are not tempted to bring it inside a garage or other enclosed structure. Generators also pose a risk of shock and electrocution, especially in wet conditions. Dry your hands before touching a generator.
- **Do not use** outdoor cooking devices, such as grills or camp stoves, indoors.
- **Place a carbon monoxide detector** that is battery powered (or has battery back-up power) outside each sleeping area. CO detectors are in most stores. Look for the UL mark with the "Single Station Carbon Monoxide Alarm" statement.

If You Suspect CO Poisoning

- Leave the house at once.
- Call the fire department or 911.
- Get medical attention. Call the Poison Center (1-800-222-1222) or your doctor *after* you leave the house.
- Do not go back into the building until the fire department tells you it is safe.

For more information on carbon monoxide, go to:

www.maine.gov/mema/prepare/prep_display.shtml?163657